ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT
Fisheries Division
Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks
Douglas Creek Fish Ladders

General Purpose: The 1995 Montana Legislature enacted sections 87-1-272 through 273, MCA that direct Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) to administer a Future Fisheries Improvement Program (FFIP). The program involves providing funding for physical projects to restore degraded fish habitat in streams and lakes for the purpose of improving wild fisheries. The legislature established an earmarked funding account to help accomplish this goal. Additionally, the 1999 Montana Legislature amended statute sections 87-1-273, 15-38-202 and Section 5, Chapter 463, Laws of 1995 to create a bull trout and cutthroat trout enhancement program. This legislation was amended again in 2013 to open the program to all native fish species (statute section 87-1-283). The program now calls for the enhancement of native fish through habitat restoration, natural reproduction and reductions in species competition by way of the FFIP.

The FFIP is proposing to provide partial funding to a project calling for the installation of fish ladders on two Douglas Creek diversions. The fish ladders will be attached to the new diversions as a condition of an approved 310 permit. This permit stipulates that fish ladders must be installed by October 29, 2015.

I. Location of Project:

The project site is located on Douglas Creek, a tributary to Nevada Creek, within Township 13N, Range 11W, Sections 28 and 33 (Attachment 1). It is located near Helmville in Powell County.

II. Need for the Project:

One goal within FWP's six-year operations plan for the fisheries program is to "protect, maintain, and restore native fish populations, their habitats, life cycles, and genetic diversity to ensure stewardship of native species." By implementing habitat restoration projects through the FFIP, this critical goal can be achieved. This project would restore fish passage to a stream that supports westslope cutthroat trout, a Montana "Species of Special Concern."

III. Scope of the Project:

This project is a first step towards improving the fisheries in the lower Douglas Creek drainage. The two diversions were designed with no fish passage consideration and are expected to last for decades. The fish passage requirement addresses shortcomings in the original design of the diversions. As part of the approved 310-team member report, the Meyers Company Ranch (per applicant Jim Phillips) has agreed to use the fish ladders for their intended purpose as part of the 310 process. Each fish ladder will be 2.5 feet high x 3.0 feet wide x 11.5 feet long, with four sets of slots (Attachment 2), have a slope of approximately 8%, metal thickness of 3/16 inches, and a powder-coat finish. This project will obtain the proper permits for construction.

The total estimated cost for this project is $4,993. Of this total, the FFIP would be contributing up to $2,496.50. The remaining funds will come from other sources and from in-kind services:

Contributor	In-kind services	In-kind cash
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service		$2,496.50
TOTAL = $2,496.50		

IV. Environmental Review

Project Title: Douglas Creek Fish Ladders
Division/Bureau: Fisheries Division / Habitat Bureau (FFIP)
Description of Project: The FFIP tentatively plans to provide partial funding to a project calling for the installation of two fish ladders on Douglas Creek.

Evaluation of the impacts of the Proposed Action including secondary and cumulative impacts on the Physical and Human Environment.

A. PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Geology and soil quality, stability and moisture				X		
2. Air quality or objectionable odors				X		
3. Water quality, quantity and distribution (surface or groundwater)				X		
4. Existing water right or reservation				X		
5. Vegetation cover, quantity and quality				X		
6. Unique, endangered, or fragile vegetative species				X		
7. Terrestrial or aquatic life and/or habitats				X		X
8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species			X			X
9. Introduction of new species into an area				X		
10. Changes to abundance or movement of species			X			X

B. HUMAN ENVIRONMENT

Will the proposed action result in potential impacts to:	Unknown	Potentially Significant	Minor	None	Can Be Mitigated	Comments Provided
1. Noise and/or electrical effects				X		
2. Land use				X		
3. Risk and/or health hazards				X		
4. Community impact				X		
5. Public services/taxes/utilities				X		
6. Potential revenue and/or project maintenance costs				X		
7. Aesthetics and recreation				X		
8. Cultural and historic resources				X		X
9. Evaluation of significance				X		
10. Generate public controversy				X		

V. Explanation of Potential Impacts on the Physical Environment.

7. Terrestrial and aquatic life habitats.

This project involves installation of two fish ladders. Impacts to aquatic life include temporary construction and instream work. Long term, this effort is expected to improve the overall aquatic and riparian habitat in Douglas Creek, benefiting westslope cutthroat trout and other fish species.

8. Unique, endangered, or fragile wildlife or fisheries species.

This project will affect westslope cutthroat trout, federally identified as a sensitive species, and designated "Species of Concern" in Montana. The impacts on the species as a result of this project are predicted to be positive, increasing recruitment and survival.

10. Changes to abundance of movement of species.

There are cutthroat trout throughout the headwaters of Douglas Creek and in Nevada Creek at the mouth of Douglas Creek. The project is intended to allow westslope cutthroat trout the ability to navigate the channel when the diversions are in use. The fish ladders are also intended to allow westslope cutthroat trout the ability to escape dewatering caused by the diversions.

VI. Explanation of Impacts on the Human Environment.

None.

VII. Discussion and Evaluation of Reasonable Alternatives.

1. No Action Alternative.

The no action alternative would accept aquatic impacts and the continued loss of fisheries values in lower Douglas Creek for an unknown period. The fish ladders would not be installed.

2. The Proposed Alternative.

The proposed alternative intends to provide partial funding through the FFIP to install two fish ladders. The fish ladders are a required stream permitting action.

VIII. Environmental Assessment Conclusion Section.

1. Other groups or agencies contacted or which may have overlapping jurisdiction.

North Powell Conservation District, Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation, US Fish and Wildlife Service, US Army Corps of Engineers, Montana Department of Environmental Quality, State Historic Preservation Office

2. Is an EIS required?

No. We conclude, from this review, that the proposed activities will have an overall positive impact on the physical and human environment, and will therefore not require the extensive analysis associated with an EIS.

3. Level of public involvement.

The project application to the FFIP has been posted on the FWP webpage for public comment. No comments have been received to date. The proposed project was reviewed and supported by the public review panel of the FFIP. The proposed project also will be reviewed by the Fish and Wildlife Commission, and funding will be contingent upon their approval. The EA will be distributed to all individuals and groups listed on the cover letter and will be published on the FWP webpage: **www.fwp.mt.gov**.

4. Duration of comment period?

Public comment will be accepted through 5:00 PM on February 16, 2015.

5. Person(s) responsible for preparing the EA.

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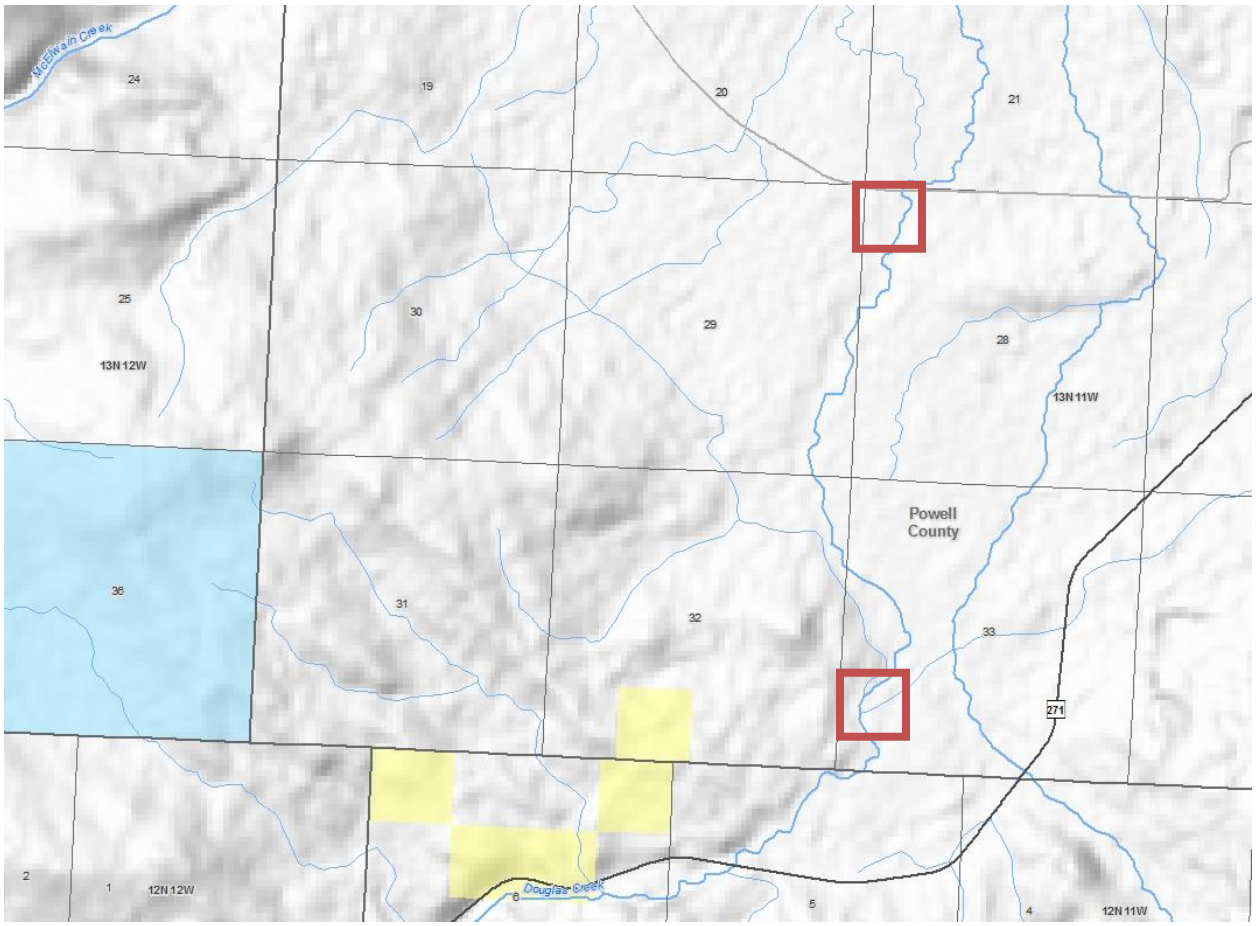
ATTACHMENT 1 (PROJECT LOCATIONS)



ATTACHMENT 2

Photos 4 and 5. These photos show the basic design of the fish ladders.